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BLM - ALASKA
FRONTIERS

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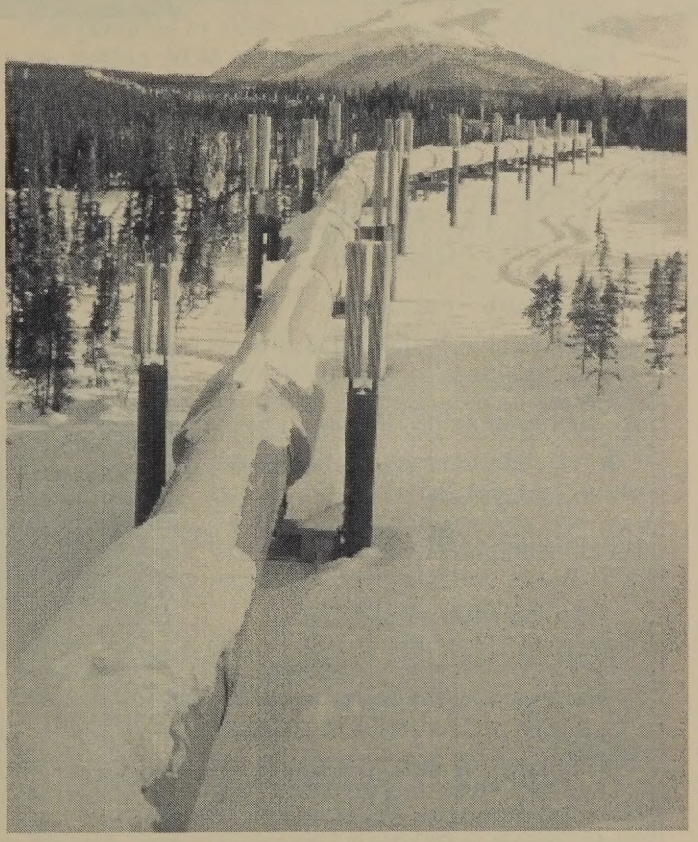
JPO hires consultants to assure safety

The Bureau of Land Management hired Aladon Ltd. and Spearhead System Consultants Ltd., two consulting firms, to assess current maintenance management for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), and to identify maintenance needed to ensure long-term safe operation of the pipeline.

The federal right-of-way (ROW) grant for the TAPS is up for renewal in January 2004. The ROW requires TAPS to be operated and maintained under sound engineering practices, using the most advanced technology available. Jerry Brossia, federal head of the Joint Pipeline Office (JPO) says a standard process to measure the condition and effectiveness of TAPS needs to be in place before then.

Brossia says the consultants provide additional expertise needed to evaluate the aging pipeline system. The contractors plan to have their evaluation done by mid-2001. Over the next two years, they will oversee rigorous reviews of critical hardware such as pipe, tanks, valves, control systems and fire protection systems. A standard will be developed to evaluate TAPS maintenance as part of JPO's on-going pipeline oversight.

"The Department of Transportation, Office of Pipeline Safety, the State, and Alyeska Pipeline Service Company are also participating in the effort and will use the information to assess their own systems," adds Brossia. The new standard will also be used to process future applications from TAPS partner companies to renew both the federal grant and the state lease for the TAPS right-of-way.



ED BOVY

To build the pipeline, specially designed vertical supports were placed in drilled holes or driven into the ground. In permafrost and other areas where heat might cause undesirable thawing, the supports contain two 2 inch "heat pipes" containing anhydrous ammonia which vaporizes below ground, rises and condenses above-ground, removing ground heat whenever the ground temperature exceeds the temperature of the air. Heat is transferred through the walls of the heat pipes to aluminum radiators atop the pipes.

BLM rolls out final OHV strategy

Ed Bovy

BLM just released its final version of its Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) strategy after receiving more than 14,000 responses during a recent 30 day public comment period on the draft OHV strategy.

Henri Bisson, BLM's assistant director for Renewable Resources and Planning, says the goal is to "promote environmentally sound motorized OHV use on BLM public lands while protecting natural resources. Implementing these actions should help promote a balance between sometimes competing principles."

"Unlike earlier drafts, the final version doesn't cover mountain bicycles or other non-motorized forms of transportation," says Bisson. "Public comments on the draft caused us to reconsider our initial decision to cover mountain bikes and other mechanized vehicles. Because of the substantial differences between motorized and mechanized vehicles, including their types of use and impacts on resources, we removed human-powered vehicles." Instead, BLM may develop a separate strategy for mountain bikes and other mechanized (human-powered) vehicles.

In general, motorized OHV/Off-Road use is acceptable on public lands wherever compatible with BLM's resource management objectives, and when it complies with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976. The act directs BLM to manage public lands to accommodate multiple uses while protecting the natural resources.

The final OHV Strategy offers general guidance and recommends numerous actions for reviewing and resolving many motorized OHV issues, including current motorized OHV designations; signs, maps and other public information; existing motorized off-road vehicle regulations; monitoring and inventory data; OHV impacts on resources; roads and trail design and maintenance; restoration and management of special areas including Wilderness Study Areas; monitoring, education and law enforcement; and budgetary needs.

Check out BLM's Home Page (www.blm.gov) or contact any BLM office for the OHV regulations, or write to: BLM Motorized OHV Strategy
1849 C Street, NW (LS-204)
Washington, D.C. 20240-0001 Δ

OHV strategy goals

- Δ promote responsible OHV use and reduce habitat degradation
- Δ promote consistent BLM decisions, management, funding and staffing
- Δ update existing guidance and public involvement
- Δ reduce conflicts among public land users, and clarify pertinent legal authorities for BLM

Without full public participation through a formal process, BLM's OHV Strategy cannot:

- Δ revise OHV regulations, or change any legislation or Executive Orders for existing off-road use
- Δ increase funds or staffing, or increase any fines or penalties for violations of OHV regulations.

Secretary signs Campbell Tract withdrawal extension

It's official — the 20 year extension of the withdrawal of the Campbell Tract was approved and signed. The decision, made in November, means the BLM will continue to manage the 730-acre parcel of public land in Anchorage for the next 20 years.

The BLM had formally recommended that Interior Secretary Babbitt approve a 20 year extension of the withdrawal. The recommendation was the result of extensive public involvement. The related Environmental Assessment determined that extending the lease would have "no significant [negative] impacts."

All but two of the more than 400 comments received favored BLM's proposal to remain as manager of Campbell Tract lands. They were satisfied with BLM's management and the public involvement process of this issue.

The renewal of the withdrawal means BLM will continue to use the area as an administrative site to house several BLM offices, a multi-agency warehouse, an emergency airstrip, several radio communications sites, and the Campbell Creek Science Center. BLM also manages a network of trails at the tract for non-motorized recreation.

BLM-Alaska's Resource Advisory Council (RAC) passed a resolution in support of the withdrawal. The RAC is a statewide 13-member resource advisory council that provides advice and recommendations to the BLM on resource and land management issues for Alaska's federal public lands.

The extension goes into effect when the current withdrawal expires in early 2002. BLM will continue to manage the Campbell Tract for administrative and recreational purposes. No significant changes are planned, or new construction or facilities; only scheduled maintenance of existing trails, roads, buildings and the airstrip. BLM will continue to inform interested parties about activity at the tract. For more information about the Campbell Tract, visit: www.anchorage.ak.blm.gov.

Plans for the Campbell Tract include accessible trails

This year, BLM recreation planners and volunteers will upgrade Moose Tract Trail using new accessibility guidelines. When completed, the project will provide wheelchair access across Campbell Tract, linking Moose Track trailhead with the Campbell Airstrip Road trailhead.

Paul Sandhofer of Anchorage says this will be the first accessible trail in the city to use the new accessibility guidelines. "An accessible trail doesn't have to be a miniature freeway cutting through a forest. It can be a winding pathway through the woods with minimum impact on the natural setting," says Sandhofer. He serves on the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board for the Americans with Disabilities Act.

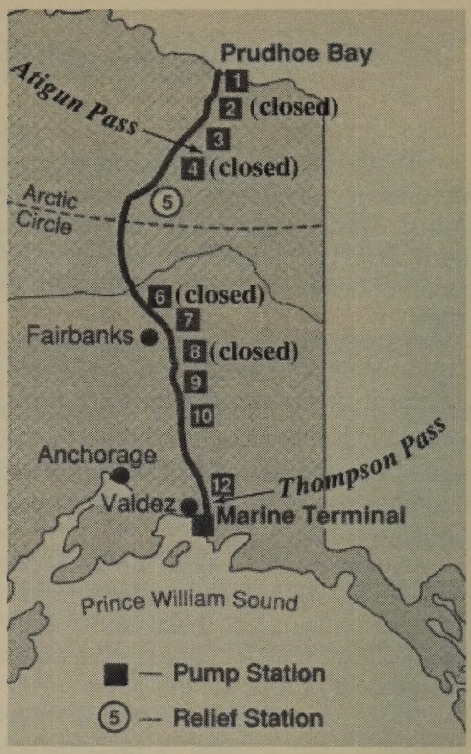
Meanwhile, BLM has asked a contractor to develop a plan to improve the Science Center access road in 2001. After the winter snowpack melts, potholes emerge which keep BLM maintenance crews busy all summer. A more durable surface would reduce the frequency for repair and free up maintenance funds for other trails and facilities. Improvements would complement the road's rustic quality.

BLM resource specialists are assessing the fire history of the Anchorage bowl. They are looking at the types of natural fuels and will combine this information with weather patterns to help predict the fire risk at the Campbell Tract.

Open space will be created around the facilities so that fire risk is reduced; this includes removing or thinning dead or dying trees. BLM will work with Campbell Tract users and local residents to develop an action plan.

All work will occur during several seasons so as to minimize impacts to the Campbell Tract.

BLM plans EIS for pipeline right-of-way



A LITTLE HISTORY ...

Oil was discovered at Prudhoe Bay in 1968 by Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO), and Humble Oil and Refining Company (now Exxon Co., USA). Subsidiaries of both, plus the British Petroleum Co., formed an agreement for a planning study and the engineering design and construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS). In 1969 plans were announced for an 800 mile pipeline from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez, Alaska. Five additional companies joined the original three, and in 1970 the owner companies incorporated the Alyeska Pipeline Service Company to manage the TAPS.

The project was controversial from the start. Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Stuart Udall had declared a moratorium on land selections in Alaska in 1967 in response to Alaska Native concerns about the use of their traditional lands. The land freeze prevented construction of the pipeline, but led to passage of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971. The DOI completed an environmental impact statement in 1972, and issued a Grant of Right-of-Way. The state issued the State Lease of Right-of-Way in 1974, and construction began soon after, taking three years at a cost of $8 billion. Oil began flowing through TAPS in 1977.

In 1990, six state and five federal agencies formed the Joint Pipeline Office (JPO), which works with Alyeska and North Slope permit applicants. Agencies developed cooperative agreements to share staff, knowledge, equipment and office space; eliminate duplication of work, and simplify complicated and lengthy government processes.

The Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS) turns 34 this year, but the original right-of-way (ROW) expires January 2004. The ROW is jointly managed by both the State and Federal governments.

The pipeline extends 800 miles from the North Slope to the Valdez Marine Terminal, where tankers are loaded for shipment south to the west coast. Alaska's North Slope supplies the U.S. with about 10 percent of its total crude consumption.

The ROW renewal process begins when BLM receives the application for renewal from the TAPS-owner companies. The pipeline is operated by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company for seven owner companies: BP-Amoco, ARCO, Exxon, Mobil Alaska, Amerada Hess, Phillips Alaska and Unocal.

"Before we receive the letter," says BLM State Director Fran Cherry, "we can decide what level of environmental analysis we'll need to conduct — an environmental assessment (EA) or a more in-depth environmental impact statement (EIS). Given the complexity and significance of the TAPS, and the level of public interest, we think the renewal requires an EIS."

Cherry says that the BLM, working closely with the state, will be actively seeking input from the public, Alaska Natives, industry, the environmental community and local governments." Δ

Alyeska employee survey shows improvement

The results of a survey assessing pipeline workers' attitudes about their work environment and the employee concerns program (ECP) show some positive change at Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. Compared to a similar 1998 survey, statistics for the 2000 survey indicate that Alyeska employees have a more favorable view of their work environment and ECP, but results for Alyeska managers, contract managers and contract workers were mixed. Written comments alluded to possible harassment and intimidation practices.

Beginning in 1991, a series of whistle blower complaints were reported to the media and to Congress criticizing TAPS operations. The complaints focused mainly on Alyeska's lack of a quality assurance program and safety practices. JPO was criticized for not aggressively enforcing perceived violations of regulations and the law.

In 1993, whistle blowers testified at Congressional hearings held to examine safety-related issues on TAPS. JPO was criticized for not providing comprehensive oversight to identify safety concerns, having a disjointed approach, lack of a quality control program, and unsecured funding.

BLM directed an audit of TAPS to identify and resolve TAPS problems. Quality Technical Company identified problems and recommended solutions while the TAPS owner companies conducted a more extensive audit. By combining results from these audits with five other audits, 4,920 deficiencies in systemic operations, programs, and maintenance were identified.

BLM's authorized JPO Officer, Jerry Brossia, says, "Although there is evidence that TAPS workers' ability to speak out without fear of reprisal has improved since 1993, this survey points out the need for continued attention to this area. I believe many of the problems in this whole arena can be traced to the need for an effective corrective action program on TAPS." Δ

JPO overhauls oil spill plan after 1989 disaster

The 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill disaster showed the need for improved pipeline oversight by the state and federal governments. When the Joint Pipeline Office was formed in 1990, one of the first major assignments was to help prepare an improved TAPS Oil Spill Contingency Plan that included oil spill response and preparedness.

Major changes were made to procedures, including increased equipment, staff, facilities and training. Spill reconnaissance exercises, and scheduled and unscheduled drills utilizing different spill scenarios, are now conducted over the entire pipeline and at the Valdez Marine Terminal.

The JPO recently opened an office in Valdez devoted to the surveillance and monitoring of the Valdez Marine Terminal. A lack of office space meant moving some JPO staff from the Alyeska Terminal in Valdez to the airport terminal building.

New office supervisor Allan Samet says, "The new office will offer more privacy to Alyeska employees when they come to talk to us about their concerns." Δ

JPO Federal Agencies
- Bureau of Land Management
- Dept. of Transportation/ Office of Pipeline Safety
- Environmental Protection Agency
- U.S. Coast Guard
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

JPO State Agencies
- Dept. of Natural Resources
- Dept. of Environmental Conservation
- Dept. of Fish & Game
- Dept. of Labor
- Div. of Governmental Coordination
- Dept. of Transportation/Public Facilities
- Dept. of Public Safety

Lower 48 blazes beat Alaska fires by miles

Alaska's fire season last summer was short-lived, but intense. Nevertheless, it was greatly overshadowed by the disastrous wildfire season in the Lower 48.

In Alaska, fires threatened more than 30 homesites on several lakes and rivers. Smokejumpers and hotshot crews suppressed fires near remote cabins, but a protected cabin was lost in the Tanana Zone.

"The weather in Interior Alaska was not conducive to widespread fire activity," says Mary Lynch, acting manager of the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC). "May was the third coldest ever recorded in the Interior. Temperatures that July were cooler than the previous 19 years in Fairbanks, and August was the second coolest on record."

However, conditions were dry in late June. Persistent southwest winds blew smoke into the Tanana Valley and the State issued a health advisory for air quality. Rain showers slowed fire activity on July 9, and by July 17, no staff were needed.

The extraordinary fire season in the Lower 48 began early with the escape of a prescribed fire near Los Alamos, New Mexico, in early May; 18,000 residents were evacuated from their homes. Hot shot crews were dispatched to assist in the southwest area, the earliest Alaska hot shot crews had ever been called to the Lower 48.

In mid-July, lightning caused fires, and extreme burning conditions in Montana and Idaho triggered a massive nationwide mobilization. Lynch says staff from Alaska were sent on assignments throughout the western states. The AICC processed a record number of overhead requests (921) to the Lower 48, and 73 Type 2 crew requests, the second largest number on record. Alaska's Type 1 Incident Management Team had four assignments in the Lower 48, which is also a record.

— Andy Williams

Congress increases fire prevention budget

Congress approved an additional $1.8 million in new financing to improve protection for, and reduce wildfire risk to, rural communities. The extra funds mean more fire engines, helicopters and tanker planes, and hiring more firefighters, including hot shot crews, smokejumpers and support workers. Increased prescribed burning and tree-thinning will reduce natural fuels near communities.

"The new rural funding allows us to work better with rural fire departments," says Jack Sept, external affairs chief for the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC). "We are trained to fight wildland fires and the local fire departments are trained to protect structures. So when we come together in the same areas we'll be able to work more effectively."

Winter fire burns tundra

An end-of-year fire in the tundra caught fire community officials by surprise. The blaze was first sighted December 27, and little or no snow covered the area.

While wildfires rarely burn during winter in Alaska, the blaze apparently started when a snowmachine caught fire near Kotlik on the southern coast of Norton Sound. Northeast winds gusting to 40 mph fanned the flames. About 12,891 acres of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge was burned says Ken Coe, Galena Zone Fire Management Officer at the Alaska Fire Service.

Thinning trees reduces urban wildfires

In 1999, flames blazed in a black spruce forest behind a subdivision on Fort Wainwright near Fairbanks. The fire came close to scorching homes in the Shannon Park Subdivision — too close.

A year later, a different story. Last summer threats of wildfires consuming homes was substantially reduced, thanks to a fuels management project by the Alaska Fire Service (AFS). The fire in '99 was a wake-up call to the danger of having stands of black spruce near subdivisions. The fuels management project was led by Tamala DeFries, fire management officer for military lands.

Project planners for the program thinned spruce stands at least 80 feet from houses, with at least six feet between trees, for about a mile bordering the subdivision. Cleared areas have less materials that could fuel a wildfire and give fire fighters more room to work.

DeFries' office worked with the Fairbanks Fire Department (FFD), the State Division of Forestry (DOF) and the Army. At a meeting held at a school near the subdivision, AFS representatives discussed the fuels reduction project, while Ernie Misewicz of the FFD presented a prevention program, and Bud Rotroff of the DOF discussed suppression options. The dozen or so people who attended the meeting unanimously supported the project, and favorable stories were reported in the *Fairbanks Daily News-Miner*, and on several radio and TV stations.

Before heading to Lower 48 fires, emergency fire fighters completed most of the project work. Trees were cut, stacked in eight-foot lengths, and made available to members of the public who acquired permits from the Army. The slash was stacked and some was burned before winter; the remaining slash will be burned next year.

DeFries says the thinning method reduces the risk of fire but preserves the existing forest stand. Similar projects are being considered for two other areas on Fort Wainwright where black spruce stands may pose a threat. AFS is also working with the Tanana Chiefs Conference on a larger fuels thinning project near Tanacross, DeFries adds.

— Andy Williams

DAN GULLICKSON

AFS crews thinned black spruce near a subdivision last summer to reduce wildfire danger. Piles of slash were burned as winter closed in.

Last summer's 368 wildfires fewer than the state average of 630

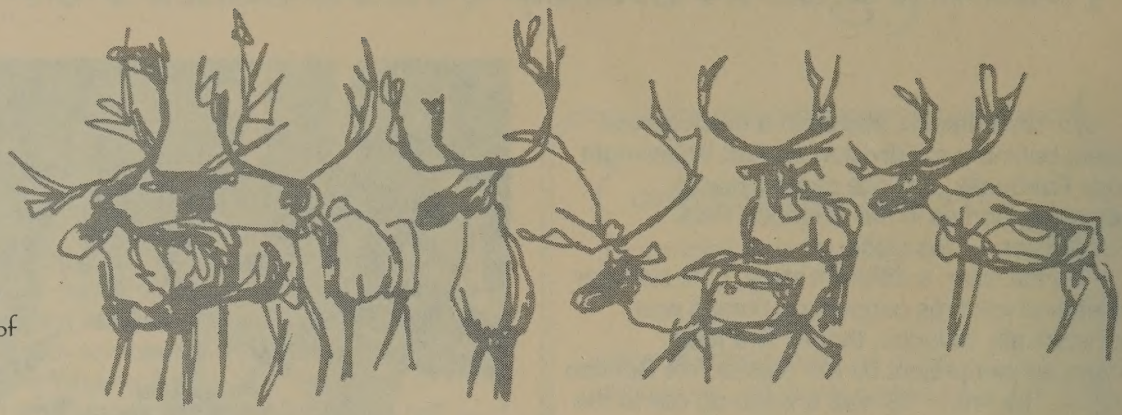
Mary Lynch, fire intelligence officer with the Alaska Interagency Coordination Center (AICC), tracks fire statistics.

Lynch says 368 wildland fires burned 743,405 acres in Alaska last summer. The 10 year average from 1990 to '99 is 630 fires and 978,000 acres burned.

People started 285 of the fires, but none were major. Lightning ignited 83 fires that burned about 740,000 acres. Most fires occurred from June 24 to July 10, when the total climbed from 25,000 acres to 658,000 acres.

The hot spot was the Tanana Zone, where 86 percent of the acreage burned. The zone had the four largest fires and seven of the top ten.

Western Arctic Caribou Herd group meets in Kotzebue



Members of the Working Group for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd met in January in Kotzebue to plan the development of a western arctic caribou herd management plan. The plan will identify, analyze and recommend management options in case of a decline in the population of the herd. The group formed two years ago. After dealing with organization, representation and management issues, they finally reviewed a newly-approved charter.

The 13 representatives come from villages throughout the range of the western arctic herd. They meet regularly to exchange traditional and western scientific knowledge. Through consensual decision making, they coordinate and submit suggested management guidelines to the Alaska Board of Game, the Federal Subsistence Board, and land management agencies.

State, federal and Native agencies who support the group's efforts and act as advisors include the BLM, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Maniilaq Association, Kawereak Association and numerous village Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) Councils.

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